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HOMELESS VETERANS

The latest census of homeless persons in San Francisco shelters revealed that 48% reported being veterans. Of these, 42% are veterans of the Vietnam Era, and 18% have served in combat duties in Vietnam. The severe problems of stress and emotional conflict which characterize homeless veterans are primarily a result of traumas and violence suffered in the military, and the lack of treatment in the post - service period.

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-Severe drug and alcohol abuse is prevalent as a method of coping, and contributes to the acting out of aggressive behavior which was taught in the military.

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Facts:

- Veterans comprise 11% of the City's population, yet make up almost half of the homeless.
- During the 18 month period January 1983 - June 1984, Swords To Plowshares served 483 San Francisco veterans who indicated they were homeless at the time of the intake interview.
- 70,000 veterans were killed in Vietnam, an additional 110,000 have died of suicide or substance abuse since their return home.
- 70% of the homeless veterans served by Swords To Plowshares have manifested disabling mental and/or emotional stress. Approximately 10% could be characterized as chronically mentally ill, with the remaining 60% at risk of further deterioration without treatment for Stress Syndromes.
- As a result of lack of treatment for this group, most have not held any job for more than a 12 month period.
- Severe drug and alcohol abuse is prevalent as a method of coping, and contributes to the acting out of aggressive behavior which was taught in the military.
- Vietnam Era Vets are isolated from other veterans support groups, and from potential treatment by the Federal government. Sword's experience shows that vets are capable of change when offered informed treatment.



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Needs:

- Mental health outreach counseling for veterans in the shelters and hotels. The Episcopal Sanctuary, Support Services, and St. Vincent DePaul have begun providing specialized services to the veterans in their programs. These and other service providers are overwhelmed with the dimensions of this problem, and need immediate support.
- Non-threatening living situations which provide crisis counseling and peer group support.
- Advocacy to make available through the Veterans Administration and Federal programs more health services to relieve some of the pressure from San Francisco General Hospital, Mission Emergency, and Central Receiving. A higher degree of VA responsibility is needed.
- A drop-in day center where homeless veterans can break their isolation, begin resocialization, and develop one to one contacts with mental health workers.
- A significantly expanded pre-vocational training program, which provides readjustment counseling designed to prepare vets to enter the labor market. We have experienced that employment is an outcome that contributes significantly to the healing process of the vet.

DESCRIPTION OF HOMELESS VETERANS IN SAN FRANCISCO - OCTOBER, 1985

1. In two recent self-administered surveys of homeless persons in the San Francisco shelters, veterans comprised 29.7 percent of persons sheltered in April, 1985 and 31.3 percent in October, 1985. A survey of "street persons" conducted at five locations on September 24, 1985 revealed that 36.4 percent of the respondents were veterans.
2. Shelter surveys reveal that more than 86 percent of the veterans had held jobs for more than one year.
3. Nearly 31 percent of the homeless veterans reported they had permanent physical disabilities.
4. Twenty-five percent admitted to having a mental health problem.
5. Slightly more than 45 percent admitted they had some level of alcohol abuse with 19 percent reporting "severe" alcohol problems.
6. Problems of drug abuse were reported by 24 percent of the homeless veterans.
7. Seventy-eight percent of the homeless veterans claimed to have a "marketable skill," but yet only slightly more than six percent reported some level of income from employment.
8. More than 16 percent reported employment as a need to stabilize their lives.

The following needs were listed by the homeless veterans:

(N = 152)

Housing	21.4%
Job/Job Training	18.1%
Clothing	10.4%
Food	10.4%
Alcohol/Drug Services	9.9%
Medical Services	7.4%
Veterans Assistance	7.4%

9. The average age of the homeless veterans was 41.8 years and the median length of San Francisco residence was 3.0 years.
10. Nearly 79 percent of the homeless veterans reported they had received an Honorable Discharge yet less than five percent were receiving Veterans Administration financial assistance.
11. Of the 152 veterans in the October, 1985 survey, 44 percent (60 vets) were veterans of the Vietnam Era and 74 percent of the Vietnam Era veterans served in Vietnam.
12. Homeless veterans responding to the October, 1985 surveys had spent an average of 107.0 days in San Francisco's homeless shelters.

